

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 10506

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: PINT, SP
SUBJECT: FRAGA, CARRILLO IN HARD-HITTING DEBATE

1. THE CONGRESS OF DEPUTIES SESSION DECEMBER 23 WAS THE OCCASION OF HARD-HITTING STATEMENTS PITTING COMMUNIST CHIEF SANTIAGO CARRILLO AGAINST CONSERVATIVE AP LEADER MANUEL FRAGA. THE EXCHANGES, IN WHICH OTHER PARTY SPOKESMEN ALSO TOOK PART, WERE NOT PART OF A FORMAL DEBATE AT ALL, BUT ENSUED WHEN THE PSOE, HAVING SOUGHT A COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO THE RECENT PUBLIC-ORDER DISTURBANCES IN MALAGA AND TENERIFE, INSISTED ON AN "EXPLANATION OF VOTE".

2. FRAGA TOOK THE OCCASION TO WRAP HIMSELF IN THE NATIONAL (AS OPPOSED TO THE OTHER CURRENT FAVORITES) FLAG, AND TO SIDE FIRMLY WITH THE PUBLIC-ORDER FORCES, LISTING THE NUMBERS OF ATTACKS AND INSULTS AGAINST THE VARIOUS GROUPS (GUARDIA CIVIL, ARMED POLICE) AND BEMOANING THE "PROCESS OF DEGRADATION OF PUBLIC ORDER". WHEN IT WAS CARRILLO'S TURN, HE CHARGED FRAGA WITH DREDGING UP PRE-CIVIL-WAR WORDS AND CONCEPTS
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(FRAGA HAD IN FACT QUOTED CONSERVATIVE LEADER CALVO SOTELO, WHOSE ASSASSINATION WAS A KEY PRE-WAR EVENT), AND WENT ON TO ACCUSE HIM OF PLAYING THE SAME GAME AS (THE ELDER) GIL ROBLES IN THAT PERIOD, STIRRING UP PASSIONS BY CRYING CALAMITY. "A SECOND ROUND", CARRILLO WARNED, WOULD NOT BE WON BY THE SAME PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THOSE REPRESENTED BY FRAGA.

3. UCD SPOKESMAN PEREZ-LLORCA LAMENTED THE DEBATE, REJECTING THE PSOE CHARGE THAT GOVT WAS TRYING TO "SILENCE THE PSOE VOICE" BUT CALLING "NEGATIVE" A DEBATE WHICH REVIVED THE "OLD TRAUMAS" OF THE CIVIL WAR. EXERCISING HIS RIGHT OF REPLY, FRAGA INSISTED HE SOUGHT NEITHER TO DRAMATIZE THE SITUATION NOR TO MONOPOLIZE THE FLAG, AND CONGRATULATED CARRILLO ON HIS RECENT CONVERSION TO THAT FLAG, ADDING THAT SHEEP'S CLOTHING WOULD NEVER COVER "CERTAIN FEET RED WITH BLOOD". CALLED TO ACCOUNT FOR PERSONAL ALLUSIONS BY CONGRESS PRESIDENT ALVAREZ DE MIRANDA, FRAGA REJOINED THAT HE HAD BEEN THE OBJECT OF MANY SUCH ALLUSIONS THAT MORNING.

4. AFTERWARDS, EFFORTS WERE MADE TO CALM THINGS DOWN. CARRILLO DENIED THREATENING ANOTHER CIVIL WAR, CLAIMING HE HAD MERELY SOUGHT TO WARN AGAINST "INVOLUTION", AND ALVAREZ DE MIRANDA DECLARED THERE WERE ALLUSIONS MADE TO FRAGA THAT SHOULD HAVE BEEN CUT OFF. PRESS COMMENT GENERALLY ECHOED PRIME MINISTER SUAREZ' COMMENT THAT HE WAS "SADDENED" BY THE EVENT, AND A CONSENSUS QUICKLY DEVELOPED THAT THE DEBATE WAS BEST FORGOTTEN.

5. THERE WERE SOME HEARTENING ASPECTS: THE PSOE EVIDENTLY LEARNED ONE LESSON FROM THE JAIME BLANCO CONFIDENTIAL

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AFFAIR (MADRID 6896), AND ALTHOUGH IT FORCED THE DEBATE THROUGH INSISTING ON AN EXPLANATION OF VOTE, ITS OWN INTERVENTIONS WERE ESSENTIALLY MODERATE. THE SPEECH OF INTERIOR MINISTER MARTIN VILLA WAS WIDELY JUDGED THE BEST OF THE DAY FOR ITS LOW KEY AND THOUGHTFUL CONTENT. ALMOST INCIDENTALLY, THE COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY, THE AGENDA ITEM WHICH BROUGHT ALL THE FUROR, WAS ESTABLISHED, WITH 299 VOTES IN FAVOR, 2 OPPOSED, AND 17 (MOSTLY AP) ABSTENTIONS.

6. COMMENT: IT WAS, IN FACT, A LAMENTABLE SESSION, BUT IT SERVED TO SHOW INTER ALIA WHY SO MANY HERE ARE SO WARY OF AROUSING CIVIL-WAR PASSIONS: FOR ONE THING, IT IS ALL TOO EASY TO DO. IF THIS DEBATE--OR SHOUTING MATCH--SERVED A USEFUL PURPOSE, IT WAS TO REMIND ALL CONCERNED OF THE NEED TO PRESERVE THE GENTLEMEN'S-AGREEMENT CONSENSUS PLACING TOP PRIORITY ON THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY. WE JUDGE THAT THE CARRILLO-FRAGA EXCHANGE, FOR ALL IT MAY HAVE REVEALED OF LATENT PASSIONS, WAS ESSENTIALLY AN EPISODE, AND THAT THE CONSENSUS REMAINS INTACT. EATON

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